

A cry at the final breath

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A cry at the final breath

by [unknownusername](#)

Summary

Death is a constant in the League, it hangs over Damian's shoulders like a well worn cloak. Damian knows that one day he will fall by another or by his own blade. It is the way of the League and it is all he knows.

Notes

Content Warnings: undiagnosed mental health issues, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempt, self worth issues

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Damian was taught that anything less than perfect was worthless. He is expected to be perfect, to be above all else except his grandfather. He lives as long as he is of use. In the League it is very simple; you succeed and live or fail and die. Damian has seen assassins cut their own throat, shoot themselves in the head, choke on cyanide. He has beheaded those too cowardly to die honorably. Death is a constant in the League, it hangs over Damian's shoulders like a well worn cloak. Damian knows that one day he will fall by another or by his own blade. It is the way of the League and it is all he knows.

Gotham is different.

When Damian first fails and disappoints his father, he expects to be killed or at the very least, punished. Belatedly, he remembers his father's rule of no killing. So father wouldn't kill him but did that mean he wanted Damian to do it? He waits for punishment all day and night but nothing happens.

Life in Gotham is confusing. Nothing is as it should be. The rules are all different and there is no clear punishment. Damian is constantly waiting for a punishment, for some surprise attack. His father said there was no killing allowed but there were things in life more horrifying than death. Damian hates not knowing when a punishment is going to happen. He hates always being scared, being even more paranoid than usual. No one is telling him what to do. If father isn't snapping at him to stay out of the way, he is left alone. He doesn't know if this is some sort of test. Is Father waiting for him to slip up? Is he collecting evidence to present to him when he is finally punished?

Gotham is murky - both in the metaphorical and literal sense considering the thick layer of smog that smothered the city - and Damian can't get a foothold. When his father dies, Damian is sure he will be sent back to his mother, sent back to be punished for his failure, but he wasn't. On the day of Father's funeral, Richard gently brings Damian into a hug. Damian goes stiff as a board, mind racing with possibilities of what he might do to him and how Damian will retaliate. Richard does the opposite of what he expected.

Grayson only says to him, "I know I'm not Bruce and I'm not going to pretend to be. But I'm here for you, alright? It's just you and me, Dami, we'll be okay."

Damian is bewildered. He doesn't even know where to begin with what in that statement confuses him. He follows Grayson into the Manor and lives there in limbo until Grayson decides to pick up the mantle of Batman and asks Damian to be his Robin.

It is the last thing he expected and for a moment he thinks it is a cruel joke. Grayson is sincere, though, and he is looking at Damian earnestly. As if Grayson thought for a moment that Damian would say anything but yes.

Damian dares to think then that maybe he is finally finding his place in this city. Maybe he is finally finding somewhere he can call home. It is a sentimental and foolish hope but Grayson makes him feel safe. Damian can't remember ever feeling safe in his life. More than that, Grayson makes him hopeful. Damian will never admit it but he looks up to Grayson a lot and he wants to make him proud, make him proud like he could never make his own father feel proud. He wants to be better, if only because someone actually believes he has the capacity to be. Grayson is a sentimental fool but he is also a genius and a hero, he is everything Damian imagined his father to be when he was younger. Damian thinks that maybe he is finally loved, despite all his faults and darkness and the blood stained on his hands.

And then Father comes back.

Damian should be happy, he knows. He should be thrilled to get to know his father, to live with him and train with him. Why is it then, that Damian dreads the day Grayson drops him off at the Manor. Grayson's face is carefully blank but he hugs Damian tightly before saying goodbye.

He doesn't see Grayson again for three months.

Father is both unchanged from before his disappearance and completely different. It is the same intensity and focus on vigilantism, the same brutal training but different because father no longer wants to work alone. He just doesn't want to work with Damian. Damian doesn't know what he did specifically, or if there is even a reason for it. He knows his father doesn't trust him. He knows his father and Drake have contingencies for if Damian ever kills again. His father looks at him with suspicion and contempt, or he doesn't look at him at all. Damian doesn't know what to do, what he can do to prove himself to his father. He has already followed his code of honor for a year with Grayson, he already was Robin and helped save people. He is trying to be good, he hasn't killed anyone and he understands now why killing was wrong.

Drake is back in the Manor, something that constantly puts Damian on guard. Drake loathes him and Damian can't blame him. He did try to kill him and he did take away Robin, even if it was technically given to him. Drake avoids him or snaps at him. He knows that to Drake, he is little more than a monster. Damian can't fault him for that as well. Damian is a monster, that is something he has always known. It is what he was raised to be.

Damian starts to doubt if Grayson ever cared for him at all. Why else would he leave him here all alone? Why else would he abandon him without trying to contact him again? He knows that Nightwing is active again in Bludhaven, but Grayson never calls or visits. He doesn't know what he did wrong but it must have been something. Unless Grayson was lying to him the whole time? Had he only taken Damian in because of obligation to their dead father? Was everything else he said a lie? Did Damian even deserve to have the mantle of Robin or was that a lie too?

Everything about Damian's life in Gotham is a failure. It is disgraceful. His own father despises him and the one person he thought might care about him left him. How could Damian have failed so miserably? How could he allow himself to have fallen so low? He should've known the first day Father beat him in combat and locked him in a room, the day he tried to kill Drake, the day he killed that low level criminal in a vain attempt to prove his worth. He should have known he was unworthy then and he is just as unworthy now.

In the League he should've been killed a thousand times over. In the League he could have at least died in an honorable death. Father despises the League but perhaps he would agree on this. Damian is unworthy of this life but he can still do the honorable thing. He can still make this right.

Father dislikes guns which would be the quickest way. Damian could take his swords, he supposes it can be some justice in ridding himself with the same weapon he used to kill so many others. Still, he promised Grayson he would never kill again and it feels like a betrayal to kill himself with the same weapon he vowed over. Grayson doesn't care for him but Damian still cares about him and his opinion.

Damian knows he probably deserves a painful and ugly death for all the pain he has caused, but he wants to at least find some measure of peace before he goes. The closest he's ever felt to peace was sitting on the rooftops of Gotham, next to Grayson as they watched the sunrise. Gotham is a smoggy, dreadful city but it has become the closest place he has to a home and the skyline has become a welcoming sight. He would like to see it one last time.

Damian doesn't go in his Robin armor. He is unworthy of wearing it. He goes in his civilian clothes, without his sword or belt. He nimbly bypasses the security of the Manor and walks towards the city. It is a long walk but the quiet is peaceful. Damian is comfortingly numb. He knows enough of human psychology to know this is probably dissociation but he feels calm for the first time in so long that he can't bring himself to care.

Damian doesn't have to decide where to go. There is only one building tall enough for the best view in Gotham. His feet lead him to the Wayne Tower, past the security guard and the cameras. The security is good, but not enough to stop him. He walks up the many flights of stairs, not minding the trek, until he reaches the roof. There is still around thirty minutes before sunrise as Damian steps up on the ledge of the roof. He is unafraid of falling. The height is almost a comfort now. Him and Grayson had spent many nights sitting on tall buildings, jumping off of them only to catch themselves with a grappling hook. There would be no grappling hook this time. The thought is a relief.

No more shameful failure, no more miserable humiliation. Only the embrace of absolute nothingness.

The door to the roof is thrown open behind him and he hears a strangled gasp. He glances over his shoulder to see Grayson, frozen in the doorway, staring at him in a curious blend of terror and shock.

"What are you doing here Grayson?" He asks.

Grayson jerks forward before freezing again, "Damian, what are you doing up there?"

"Don't play stupid," Damian huffs, faintly irritated. "Aren't you supposed to be in Bludhaven?"

"Damian, please," Grayson's voice sounds odd, like he is being choked. Damian narrows his eyes at him. For some reason that sends Grayson into a panic, though the only indication of it is his eyes widening as a strangled noise escapes him.

"We can talk about that later," Grayson says pleadingly. "Can you please get down from there?"

"Did father send you?" Damian guesses. He sighs in annoyance. He didn't really expect his father to come after him anyways, except to maybe collect his body, but sending in Grayson was somehow more irritating than him not sending anyone at all. Does his father know how Grayson played him for a fool? Does he think Damian still hasn't figured it out? What was the point of sending anyone after him, anyways? His father doesn't even care for him beyond the vague sense of familial duty.

"No, I came on my own," Grayson's voice is carefully calm but his hands are trembling and his eyes are still wide. "Alfred got a security alert on the tower and I was nearby for a case so he called me."

Nearby for a case, of course. Damian doesn't know why that explanation stings. Grayson could come to Gotham for a case but not for him, what else did Damian expect? His pathetic hopes have warped his sense of reality.

"Fine. Tell Pennyworth it was nothing and leave, then."

"I don't want to leave you."

"Now you don't want to?" Damian scoffs incredulously. "Typical."

"Damian, you know why I had to leave-"

"No! I don't know why! Because no one ever tells me anything!" Damian turns so sharply, he would have lost balance if he were anyone else. Grayson lurches forward, expression horrified but Damian instinctively shifts his weight back at his approach and Grayson stops. His eyes are wild with panic, his normally tan skin pale.

"Dami, please get down from there, please just talk to me for a second."

"I don't want to talk anymore! Why should I talk to you anyways? Where the hell have you been? You've been gone for months and now you have the audacity to come lecture me? No, fuck you Grayson, you don't get to do that." Damian's apathy is obliterated in the face of his fury. He is humiliated to feel his eyes burn. He won't cry, he has not in years, but the threat of tears only serves to make him angrier.

"Damian, I never wanted to leave you, I didn't leave because of you! Bruce was back and he's your dad, kiddo, I thought you wanted to spend time with him."

"Spend time with him? The only time Father deigns to speak with me is when I'm in his way. It was like this before he left, why would it change now?"

Grayson's lips press together briefly in irritation. Not at Damian, but at Bruce. Damian doesn't know why that would surprise Grayson. Their father has never liked or wanted Damian, not how he wanted his other children. He chose them. He didn't choose Damian and he never would. Damian is an obligation, a burden.

"That's shitty of him, he shouldn't do that," Grayson says, looking at Damian with determination, "I'll talk to him."

"I don't need you to fight my own battles," Damian spits out. Does Grayson truly think him so pathetic?

"I'm not trying to," Grayson almost sounds frustrated for a moment before his expression melts back to sincere. "Damian, Bruce has always been like this, it's not because of you."

"Save it," Damian dismisses. "I don't want to hear lies."

"It's not a lie-"

"Of course it is! Do you think I don't know what you people think of me? I'm a psychopathic murderer to you, just as bad as the criminals we put away every night. Father and Drake are waiting for the day I kill again so they can lock me away. I'm only saving them the trouble."

" *Damian*, " Grayson gapes at him with both shock and sorrow, "No one hates you. You're family."

"Family," Damian scoffs. "Like how my grandfather was my family? My mother?"

Grayson reels back as if Damian struck him. "Leave, Grayson."

"No," Grayson's voice is barely above a whisper. "Dami, I'm so sorry for leaving you, I didn't mean for it to come across as me abandoning you, I could never abandon you. That's my fault, okay, that's on me for not telling you why I left. But I thought you'd want to be with your father. You never had the chance before he went missing but now he's back. I only got eight years with my dad and it never felt like enough. I didn't want you to ever feel like that."

Damian blinks at him, startled. As much as Grayson is all about feelings and emotionally supporting others, he never talks about himself and he never speaks of his parents. It throws Damian's anger off course and leaves him confused.

"Why did you have to leave? Why couldn't you have stayed at the Manor?" Damian finally asks.

"You know I couldn't, kiddo, you wouldn't have ever tried to talk to Bruce if I was there. Bruce and I can't be in the same room for more than five minutes before we start arguing, anyways. It wouldn't have worked."

"But why-" Damian's voice shamefully cracks. "Why did you never try to see me? You could've at least called."

"I was being selfish," Grayson's eyes are shiny with tears, "I wanted you all to myself and it hurt too much to see you and Bruce so I thought it'd hurt less if I didn't see you at all."

Damian hates that seeing Grayson so upset still makes him emotional. He never would have been so emotional otherwise. If it was anyone in front of him but Grayson, Damian could easily detach himself. Grayson, even after all of this, still makes him feel safe, still makes him feel like it will be okay if he doesn't close himself off.

"Well?" He croaks out, "Did it?"

Grayson gives a helpless, slightly hysterical laugh "No, it really didn't."

"That was stupid of you," Damian sniffs.

"Yeah," Grayson smiles at him, "You've always been smarter than me anyways."

Damian has to look away, he can't stand to look at Grayson's heartbreaking expression. He hears Grayson take a few cautious steps towards him but he doesn't react. He's so unbelievably exhausted.

"Damian?" Grayson prompts quietly.

Damian wants nothing more than to step back and let gravity take him. He doesn't want to be in Gotham, he doesn't know what the point of him being here is. He is of no use here and things that were useless needed to be decommissioned. That is what he knows to be true and that's what he is trying to do. He can't even do that properly.

A small, pathetic part of himself wants to hide in Grayson's embrace and let him take care of everything. It is something that never would have been allowed in the League. Depending on someone else is a weakness. But Damian is so tired. He doesn't know what to do anymore. Nothing makes sense and he just wants it to stop.

"You should leave," he tries again. He isn't sure what to think of Grayson anymore. He desperately wants to believe him, he wants to believe that Grayson still loves him, that he never stopped loving him. Either way, he doesn't want Grayson to watch him die. He knows that it would hurt him.

"I'm not leaving you," Grayson says stubbornly, "Please just talk to me, Damian. Why did you come up here?"

"I think it's rather obvious what I intend to do."

"Why? You don't need to do this, Damian, you have choices. Just talk to me, let me help you,

Damian."

"Don't get overemotional, Grayson. I don't need your help. I am a weapon. When a weapon is malfunctioning, it is decommissioned." Damian sounds apathetic, even to himself.

"God," Grayson sounds vaguely horrified. "Dami, no, you're not just a weapon. You're Damian, who likes to draw and likes gardening and animals and watching Alfred cook. You're kind and sweet, even if you don't want anyone to see it. You're so smart and so fucking brave. You're the bravest, strongest person I've ever met. You're more than what the League made you and despite what they did to you, what they made you do, you're a good person. You choose to be a good person, every day. You're a hero, you're my Robin."

"Shut up, Grayson," Damian hates how weak he sounds. He hates how weak he has become.

"Please," Grayson pleads. Damian looks up at him and immediately regrets it. Grayson looks terrified and desperate. A few tears have managed to escape. "I'm so sorry I left, Dames, I'm never going to leave you again. I'll do anything, please don't do this, baby, please just talk to me."

"I don't know what to do anymore," the words escape without his permission. "Nothing here makes sense and I can't do anything *right*. I'm always getting it wrong but I don't know what I did wrong and I don't know how to fix it. I keep waiting for Father or Drake to *do* something. I just want them to get it over with already but they *won't* and I don't know what to do anymore."

"We'll figure it out together, okay?" Grayson inches closer and reaches a hand out to Damian. He doesn't grab Damian, he just offers his palm up for Damian to hold if he chooses to. "You didn't do anything wrong, kiddo, I promise you that you didn't. No one is going to send you away and no one is going to punish you."

Damian looks down at the offered hand, which is still shaking. Grayson is an emotional person, sometimes unbearably so, but he always tries to be jovial. Damian has come to realize that Grayson's smile was its own type of mask, like Damian's anger was for him. Damian has never seen him so scared.

"I'm not going to leave you again, Damian," Grayson swears to him. "I'll be with you every step of the way. You don't have to be alone."

Alone. Damian has always been alone. He's grown up surrounded by people, trainers, teachers, assassins, his mother and grandfather, his brothers. There have always been people there but Damian has always felt so adrift from them. Everyone was out of reach, in a bubble all to themselves that he couldn't touch. Grayson is the only person that he felt he could reach, the only person who cared enough to try to reach back.

"What would you have done?" Damian asks quietly. He doesn't look up at Grayson. "If I told you back then that I wanted to stay with you?"

"I would have been so happy," Grayson takes a step closer. "I wanted to adopt you, you know? I had guardianship over you, but you were my kid and I wanted everyone to know that. There's nothing I wanted more."

Damian feels a tear escape him and it's as if that one tear was breaking a dam because Damian's next breath is a shuddering sob. He shouldn't cry. It's weak to cry and he'll be punished. He deserves to be punished. He's messed up so many times, his own father is disgusted by him. His father and brother think he is a monster and they are right. But Grayson still wants him. Damian has to be worth something then, right? He isn't useless if Grayson still wants him. There's still a

chance he can be better. Someone still cared about him.

"Damian," Grayson sounds as if he is about to beg. "I love you, more than anything. I know Bruce is your dad but you're *my* kid. You're always going to be my kid, no matter what happens. There is nothing that you could do that could ever make me stop loving you."

"Are you going to take me back to him?" He asks after a long moment of silence. Damian hates how weak he sounds, how pathetic.

"Is that what you want?"

Damian shakes his head.

"I won't force you to do anything you don't want to do. If you don't want to go back tonight then that's okay."

"Can I stay with you?" Damian feels shame flush his face red but he keeps talking. "Please? I'll be better, I promise, I'll be good this time."

"Oh, sweetheart," Grayson sounds so heartbroken that Damian immediately looks up in alarm. Grayson has tears dripping down his face and he looks gutted. "You're already good enough. You're more than good enough, Dami."

Damian doesn't know if anyone has ever told him that before. It has always been that he could be better, that he wasn't perfect yet. Has anyone ever chosen him before? He has always had to prove his worth, prove that he can be useful, and it was never enough. He was always falling short. His mother loves him but she demands more and more from him, so much that Damian fears she'll take everything and leave him an empty husk. She wanted him better than he was, better than he could ever possibly be. His father never wanted him, Damian is everything the Batman hates. He doesn't know if anyone has actually loved him, for who he is now and not for some idealized version of who he could be. Damian had convinced himself a long time ago that he is simply unworthy of that type of love.

Grayson is still holding out his hand and Damian takes it hesitantly. He expects to be yanked down immediately but Grayson is still. Damian thinks of letting go. He thinks about taking that one step back, of flying and falling, of finally being free. It still tempts him. It still feels like the right thing to do, the honorable thing to do.

He thinks about it and then he steps down, off the ledge and safely back onto the roof. Grayson sobs in relief, lunging towards him and crushing him to his chest. Damian's limp in his hold, startled by the intensity of his brother's tears.

"Oh my god, Damian, thank god," Richard tucks his head under his chin and holds him so tightly that Damian can feel his heartbeat racing under his cheek where he is pressed against his chest. He can't even move, having been lifted off the ground and dangling in his brother's arms. He finds that he doesn't mind it too much. "You're okay, sweetheart. You're safe."

Damian doesn't know if Richard is trying to convince him or himself but he lets the words comfort him anyways.

"Please don't do that again," Richard begs. "Please talk to me if you feel like this again. I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to you. God, I'm so sorry Damian, I'm sorry."

Damian feels the tears he has so desperately kept at bay break free and he clings to Richard as they fall.

"It's alright, we're going to fix it, okay sweetheart? Everything will be okay. I love you." Richard presses a kiss to the top of his head, rocking him slightly in his arms. Damian hears an awful keening noise and realizes it's coming from him.

"Oh, sweetheart," Richard's own voice is thick with tears, "it's alright, you can cry, it's okay, I got you." He presses another kiss to the side of his head. "I got you, Damian, I won't let you down again, I promise."

Damian isn't sure how long he stays wrapped in his brother's arms. He cries for so long that he exhausts himself. He's still being held by Richard, who has not once stopped reassuring him that he's loved and wanted. Damian feels horrible, he feels disgusting and weak and ashamed but Richard doesn't let him go for a second. Richard allows him to cry and only shifts to properly carry Damian when he stops.

"I can walk," Damian forces himself to say.

"I know but let me carry you anyways," Richard cradles him like an infant but Damian can't even find the energy to be indignant. He just rests his cheek on Richard's shoulder, face turned into his neck. "I'm not ready to let you go yet."

"For your benefit, I suppose I can allow it."

Richard laughs, a weak imitation of his usual laugh that turns into a gasping sob. Richard presses another kiss to his hair and stays there for a moment, trying to calm down. Damian doesn't say anything, silently soaking in the comfort of being in his brother's arms. Eventually, Richard begins to walk them to the door.

"Come on, Little D, let's go home."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

He can't get the image of Damian standing at the edge of the roof, his empty eyes and monotone voice. I am a weapon, Dick remembers Damian saying, when a weapon is malfunctioning, it is decommissioned.

"God," Dick feels nauseous, stomach rolling with a mixture of horror and terror. "I could've lost him."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Damian falls asleep in Dick's arms before they even reach the penthouse. Dick has never seen Damian sleep anywhere except in a safe, secured, location unless he was knocked unconscious or drugged. The fact that he fell asleep now shows how exhausted his brother must be. Dick feels his heart ache at the sight of him sleeping. Damian isn't a peaceful sleeper. He only sleeps four or five hours on a good night and can go days without any sleep at all and not show any sign of sleep deprivation. Dick first thought that his brother must be pretending to be okay to not show weakness but he felt sick after realizing that Damian was only adapted to it because he had been trained to. His baby brother, at ten years old, had to withstand torture for his whole life and was told it was training.

Dick would never say Damian is delicate but in some ways, Damian is as fragile like a newborn. He is quick to anger and frighteningly competent in every fighting technique and weapon shown to him. He's probably the smartest kid in his generation, he's already taking classes at an online college. But the first time Dick tried to hug him, Damian thought it was an attack and stabbed him in the thigh. When Dick compliments him on something, Damian stares at him in confusion and looks as if he's waiting for the punchline. Damian still waits to be punished, he still expects to be attacked by those close to him. He has night terrors and dissociates often.

Looking at Damian now, he looks peaceful. He looks his age. He looks innocent, like he was never trained to be an assassin. Dick would give anything to give Damian a good childhood. Dick loves Damian more than he thought he could possibly love anything. He adores his kid and he just wishes Bruce could see Damian the same way Dick did. If Bruce only gave Damian a chance, Dick knows that he'd love him. But Bruce has always been stubborn. Dick doesn't know why he's surprised.

He isn't thrilled about staying in the tower when Damian tried to jump off it earlier, but the adrenaline that had pumped through him when Alfred called is rushing out of his system. He might risk the drive to Bludhaven if it was just himself but he won't risk Damian. Dick doesn't want to let his baby go, he doesn't think he can handle not having Damian within arm's reach for at least a week. Damian will get annoyed but Dick is willing to risk his wrath.

He knows he will never forget the image of his little brother, his baby in all but name, standing on the ledge of the roof. Dick has known fear all his life but he doesn't know if he's ever been that terrified before.

He's furious at Bruce for not noticing how much Damian was suffering, he's furious at Tim for not keeping Dick updated but most of all he's disgusted with himself. He let his selfishness blind him, his fear that he wasn't good enough or ready to be a father. He hates himself for leaving Damian when he so clearly needed someone there for him. He knew that Damian wasn't going to be happy about staying in the Manor but he had deluded himself into thinking that Bruce would take care of him. The Bruce of seven years ago would have but the Bruce that's here now is very different from the Bruce Dick thinks of as his dad. He needs to remember that.

He wishes that old Bruce would come back. The Bruce who let him sleep in his bed when he had nightmares, who let him ride on his shoulders when he got picked up from school. The Bruce who helped with his homework and tucked him in at night after patrol. He misses that Bruce. He misses his dad.

Dick doesn't know if he can be a good dad to Damian but he's going to try. Bruce, for all his faults, gave him a happy childhood. He wants to do the same for Damian.

In the penthouse, Dick heads straight to the bedroom, gently lowering Damian on the bed. He carefully takes off his boots and knives before tugging the blankets over Damian.

"We'll be okay, little D," he whispers quietly. He brushes Damian's hair out of his face, softly pressing a kiss to his forehead. "I got you."

Damian insists on going to the Manor with Dick, even though he looks apprehensive about it. When Dick offers to go alone, Damian adamantly refuses and snaps at him to stop being ridiculous. Damian is silent on the drive over, sullenly staring out the window. Dick lets him be, knowing that sometimes Damian just needed someone to sit in the quiet with him with no expectations.

Five minutes away from the Manor, he finally breaks the silence.

"You don't have to say anything to him," Dick assures him, "You can go straight to your room and pack and I can handle him."

Damian glances over at him, frowning dubiously. "Father won't let me walk away so easily."

"Bruce can be a stubborn asshole but he can still be reasonable. I'll talk to him. You just worry about getting your farm animals in the car."

"I only have one farm animal and she cannot fit into this car," Damian does his "I am the only one here who has a functional brain" face where he turns his nose up snootily and makes long suffering sighs.

God, Dick missed him so much.

"Why are you making that face?" Damian asks warily.

"I'm not making a face."

"Yes, you are," Damian narrows his eyes at him. "It's that face you make when you're about to attack me with physical affection."

Dick laughs, grinning at Damian fondly. "Attack you? I don't attack you."

Damian opens his mouth to argue, the kid could pick a fight with a wall honestly, but Dick continues before he can.

"I was just thinking about how much I missed you," Dick says. Damian's mouth snaps shut and he blinks at him. "I missed you every day Dames."

"Oh," he says quietly. He glances away, the tips of his ears turning red. "Yes, well, I suppose I missed you too."

If Dick wasn't driving this car he would smother Damian in a hug. Damian looks back at him and rolls his eyes.

"You can't hug me, you're driving," he says flatly. "Focus on the road, Grayson."

"I'm totally hugging you when we get out."

"You will do no such thing."

"Yes I am, I'm going to give you the biggest hug ever, just you wait."

He makes good on that promise when they get to the Manor. Damian tries to run, the little shit, but Dick has already predicted this and lunges after him, tackling his brother in a hug.

Damian makes an offended squawking noise as Dick squeezes him tightly.

"Grayson!" Damian wheezes. Despite his protests, he isn't fighting his way out of the hold, which Dick is sure Damian can do in seconds.

Dick smacks a loud, obnoxious kiss on Damian's cheek and runs before Damian can react.

"What - Grayson!" Damian sputters from behind him. Dick doesn't turn to look but he can hear the enraged scrambling of a little brother scorned and laughs. He knocks on the Manor doors and a second later, Damian slams into his back with all the force of an eleven year old boy.

"How dare you! You got your spit all over my face!" Damian has managed to crawl up to Dick's shoulders and is putting Dick in a headlock. Dick is cackling, utterly unrepentant, and unconcerned that an ex-assassin currently has him in a vulnerable position.

Alfred opens the door, his expression showing no surprise at Dick and Damian play fighting on the front steps of the Manor.

"Master Richard, Master Damian," he greets in a monotone. "Delightful to see you this morning."

"Hi Alf," Dick says brightly as Damian curses and drops down to the ground. Dick can feel the uneasiness radiating off him and he casually loops his arm around Damian's shoulders. It's as much contact that Damian will allow with other people around.

"Shall I set up two more plates for breakfast? It will be ready shortly."

Dick glances over to Damian, who looks ready to run at a moment's notice. Carefully, always carefully, Dick nudges Damian so he looks at him.

No, Damian's look says.

But free food, Dick silently argues.

You are hardly poor, Damian's exasperated expression says.

But it's Alfred's food, Dick points out with a significant raise of his eyebrows. Damian presses his lips together in reluctant assent. *Stay for a little and then see?*

Fine, Damian huffs out an irritated breath.

"If you are quite done," Alfred says dryly. "I do have things I must attend to."

"Sorry Alfred," Dick grins at him, easily seeing the fondness by the subtle twitch of Alfred's eyebrow. "I got to talk to the big guy for a second so we'll see how that goes first."

Alfred steps aside, holding the door and letting them walk in.

"I shall pencil you in as a maybe," Alfred closes the door. "Master Bruce is in his study, I'm sure you still remember the way."

Dick grimaces at the thinly veiled jab about his extended absence. Alfred had let him know quite clearly he thought he was being an idiot these past few months. Which was fair because he was, but still. Owch.

"Okay game plan, I go talk to Bruce, you pack your bags for a week and then we eat all the waffles we can stomach. Deal?" Dick turns to Damian as Alfred walks back to the kitchen.

Damian looks wary and uncertain but he gives a quick nod. "If it goes well, we'll stay for breakfast."

Damian leaves for his room and Dick takes a deep breath before heading towards Bruce's study. His temper has always been short when it comes to dealing with Bruce's emotional intelligence or lack thereof. But he couldn't afford to lose his head now, Damian was relying on him.

Dick knocks on the door and waits for Bruce's short reply of "Enter," to open it. Bruce has always been difficult to read but Dick has had years of practice. Besides Alfred, he's probably the only person in the world that can speak Bruce fluently. He can tell by the minute tightening of his hand on the pencil that Bruce is surprised and concerned to see him. His face, as always, gives nothing away.

"Hey B," Dick closes the door behind him. "I need to talk to you about Damian."

Bruce blinks, which is practically a "what's wrong is everything okay" in Bruce speak.

"Have you noticed anything about him since you've been back? Anything off?"

The corner of Bruce's mouth tilts down. "He doesn't listen to orders, he's reckless and volatile, prone to violence--"

"I didn't ask for a report about him in the field," Dick snaps impatiently. "I asked how your son was. You know, like how has he been settling in? Has he been training too hard? Nightmares? Has he been acting odd?"

Bruce is really frowning now, "He's fine."

"Fine?" He repeats incredulously. "You were ready to give me an essay about him in the field and now you have nothing to say?"

"Dick, what is this about?" Bruce demands flatly.

Keep it together, Grayson, he tells himself.

"Alfred called me last night about an alert going off in the Tower. It was Damian." Dick can see the annoyance in Bruce's expression and he shakes his head at him, warning him to wait. "When I got there he was on the roof."

Bruce says nothing, only stares at Dick as if waiting for him to go on.

"As a civilian," Dick clarifies, because to be fair a lot of their nights were spent on rooftops. "Without a grapple gun."

Bruce stares.

"Jesus," Dick sighs, does he really have to spell it out? "He was going to jump, Bruce."

At that, Bruce finally reacts. He blinks twice, a rare sight that meant Bruce was actually bewildered.

"Jump," Bruce repeats slowly. "Why?"

"Oh my god," Dick tries so valiantly to reign in his urge to scream. "He wanted to die, Bruce. Do I need to draw you a picture?"

"Why would he want that?" Bruce frowned.

"B, be honest with me here. How much time have you spent with him that's not training or patrol?"

"You're blaming me?" Bruce's eyes narrow.

"No, just listen to me for a minute. It's not anyone's fault specifically, it's all of us, we all had something to do with it. I left him and I shouldn't have."

"You couldn't keep him," Bruce retorts. "He's my son."

"Biologically, yeah, but do you spend time with him? Do you even bother to talk to him? Learn about what he likes and doesn't like?"

Bruce gets that "I am offended by what you are implying" face and Dick rushes to continue before he can be interrupted.

"B, you know I love you but you can be more of a commanding officer than a father sometimes. Especially with Damian. And I get it, okay, he did some bad shit. But he's a fucking kid, he was raised as an assassin, tortured and told it was training. He didn't know anything else before he came here, you can't blame him for that. He can be stubborn and mean but I promise you, Bruce, if you just took the time to talk to him, you'd see he's so much more than that. He's a good kid and he deserves a chance."

"Dick, he tried to kill your brother. Twice."

"I know! I'm not trying to excuse it, I'm trying to explain. Despite whatever he did, at the end of the day, he's a kid looking for his dad's approval and love. You have to give him a chance. He thinks that you hate him and that he's failing you. He feels abandoned and unloved, do you know what that does to a kid?" Dick sighs, his anger deflating. "You didn't even ask how he was. I told you your son tried to kill himself and you didn't even ask if he was okay."

"Obviously he's okay or you would be with him."

And just like that, Dick feels his fury surge right back up.

"No, he's not fucking okay, Bruce. What part of trying to kill himself do you not understand?" Dick glares at Bruce, this man he hardly recognizes anymore. "Don't you care at all? Doesn't that fucking terrify you? If I had been a minute later, it would've been too late. Does that mean nothing to you?"

"Of course it does."

"Then act like it!" Dick's voice is barely lower than a yell, "Goddammit Bruce, you have more compassion for the criminals and Arkham inmates than you have for your own son! Why are you so willing to give them a second chance, every fucking time they kill, but you won't give one to Damian? Can you not see how fucked up that is?"

Bruce just glares at him with that patented unflinching stare. Bruce has always done this, glaring and waiting for Dick to run out of steam before cutting him down with harsh words.

"Why are they so different? Is it because Damian is your son? You expect more from him? You're ashamed of him? Is that it?"

Bruce looks down, for just a moment, but that's an answer in itself.

"It is," Dick repeats quietly. "You don't think he's good enough for you."

"Dick, you are putting words in my mouth-"

"I have to because you won't say anything for yourself! Tell me I'm wrong then. Look at me and tell me that I'm wrong. I want to be wrong."

Silence. Dick scoffs incredulously, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Okay then," Dick says. "Fine. I'm taking Damian."

Bruce jolts up at this, narrowing his eyes, "You can't do that, Dick, he's still my son."

"I'm not asking you, I'm telling you that I'm taking him." Dick cuts him off. "You've chosen not to be his father. You had your fucking chance to be one and you didn't even try. I'm not going to let him be miserable here because you're too much of a stubborn asshole."

Dick turns to go, but pauses with his hand on the door knob. He looks over his shoulder at Bruce.

"I don't understand how you look at him and see the enemy. He's so easy to love, it's the easiest thing in the world. He deserves better, Bruce."

Dick steps out and closes the door after him. He's not surprised to see Tim outside, watching him with wide eyes.

"What was that about?" He asks in a hushed voice.

"Not here," Dick rubs one temple, feeling a tension headache brewing. "Can we talk upstairs?"

"Uh, yeah. Sure." Tim nervously glances at the study doors like he expects Bruce to come bursting out. "We can talk in my study."

Tim leads them to the wing opposite the living quarters, up a flight of stairs and down a hallway. This side of the Manor is mostly entertainment, libraries, various studies and an indoor gym. The Manor has always been humongous, especially when Dick was a child. Back then it was just Bruce, Alfred and Dick. He remembers that the Manor was so quiet he was always scared to make a noise. Every creak of the wood made him jump and every whisper was someone watching him. It got better the longer he was here, as it began to feel more like a home. Dick wonders if Damian saw the Manor as his home. He wonders if the Manor is as giant and scary for him as it was for Dick when he was young.

Tim opens the door to the study and shuts it after them. Dick slumps into a small couch, throwing an arm over his eyes and sighing.

"You okay?" Tim asks hesitantly as he sits in the chair across from him.

Dick laughs, feeling his eyes burn. "I'm great."

"Yeah, sure," Tim says sarcastically. "Tell me what's wrong."

"I don't get Bruce," Dick exclaims, "I don't know why I'm surprised anymore. I never should have left Damian here."

"Oh," Tim says flatly, all emotion wiped off his face in an instant. "This is about the demon brat?"

"Please don't start with that right now, Timmy, I can't handle both of you at once."

"I didn't even say anything."

"Your face said enough," Dick digs his thumbs into his temples, fruitlessly trying to stave off the headache. "Just answer me honestly here, please. Do you still have the contingency plan for Damian?"

Tim narrows his eyes slightly, "Yes."

"Do you honestly think you'll still need it one day?"

"Yes," he says without any hesitation.

"Can you please do me a favor and take Damian off of it?"

Tim gives him an exasperated look. "Dick, I'm not going to take him off just because you are compromised."

"Tim, you said you trusted me. Do you still trust me?" Dick sits up to look at him, resting his elbows on his knees so he can lean in and meet Tim's eyes.

"Yes," Tim says warily.

"Then trust me," Dick pleads. "He's our brother, and I know he's done awful things but he was raised to be an assassin. He knows now that killing is wrong and he's trying to be better."

Tim presses his lips together, glancing away.

"Why were you fighting with Bruce?" Tim asks after a moment.

Dick places his head in his hands, sighing.

"I'm taking Damian to live with me." Dick rubs his forehead tiredly. "Bruce didn't take it well, of course. As if he has any right to play the father card right now."

"What does that mean? Why are you suddenly taking Damian now?" Tim sounds confused but not unhappy about it. It makes Dick's heart hurt that two of his brother's are so apathetic towards each other.

"Last night," Dick shakes his head, his mind still reeling. He's been occupied making sure Damian is alright and then dealing with Bruce that he still hasn't had time to wrap his head around what happened. He can't get the image of Damian standing at the edge of the roof, his empty eyes and monotone voice. *I am a weapon*, Dick remembers Damian saying, *when a weapon is malfunctioning, it is decommissioned*.

"God," Dick feels nauseous, stomach rolling with a mixture of horror and terror. "I could've lost him."

Don't break now, Grayson, he tells himself, *you can't break yet, Damian needs you*.

"Dick?" Tim shifts forward and places a hand on his shoulder. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"I shouldn't have left him here, I should've known better. I thought I was doing what was best but I hurt him so much." Dick knows he's rambling but he can't help it. He takes in an unsteady breath, trying to keep calm. "He's so young and he already thinks he has nothing to live for. I thought he was getting better."

"Slow down, you're not making any sense," Tim shakes his shoulder, hard enough that Dick looks up at him. "Start from the beginning. What happened last night?"

"Alf called me. He got an alert from the Tower and he saw Damian on the cams. He was standing at the edge of the roof." Dick knows he shouldn't be telling everyone in the household but Tim was going to find out anyways. Either by Bruce or by checking cams across the city. He just wants someone to see how much Damian is hurting. He doesn't understand how they can't see it, how they turn away from him. Damian's rough around the edges but it's so obvious to Dick that all he wants is to be loved and accepted.

"I think he was really going to do it." Dick whispers. "He had tendencies in the past but he hadn't had any in a while so I thought maybe he was getting better."

Tim looks at Dick carefully, analyzing every detail in his face. "That doesn't explain why you want to take him. If he was just suicidal, you would move into the Manor. What did Damian say about Bruce?"

"It's not just about Bruce. I left him alone when I promised him I'd always be there." Dick shakes his head, "I'm not going to repeat everything, it's one thing to tell Bruce because he's his father but it's another thing to tell you. I know you, Tim, and I know the second I leave you're going to look at the cams in the Tower but please don't listen to them. If it was anyone else, I know you'd respect their privacy. Please respect his."

Tim doesn't say anything, only watches as Dick tries to pull himself together. Dick knows it's probably futile to ask Tim, hell, Bruce is probably looking at the cams right now, but he had to at least try.

"I'll talk to you, later okay Timmy?" Dick stands up and reaches a hand to Tim. When his brother takes it, he helps him to his feet and then brings him into a hug.

"What are you doing?" Tim asks in confusion.

"I watched one of my baby brothers almost die, can you let me give you a hug?" Dick squeezes him tighter, before pressing a kiss to his forehead. Tim flushes, flustered. "Promise you'll call me if you need anything?"

"Okay," Tim agrees in a daze. Dick laughs at his expression, ruffling his hair before walking to the door. "Dick?"

"Yeah?" Dick turns back to him. Tim looks conflicted and Dick raises an eyebrow, waiting.

"I'll think about taking him off the list," he finally says.

Dick smiles at him fondly. "Thanks, Tim."

When Dick finds Damian, he's sitting behind the island in the kitchen, watching as Alfred makes tea.

"Master Richard," Alfred says without looking up from the kettle. "So kind of you to join us."

"Hey Alf," Dick grins as he sits next to Damian, messing up his hair as he does. Damian bats his hands away, glaring at him. "What are you making?"

"Masala chai, for Master Damian. Would you care for a cup?"

"Yes please," Dick knows that this is Damian's comfort drink, even though he would die before admitting it. When they first moved to the apartment, when it was just Dick, Alfred and Damian, Alfred would make them masala chai in the evening. Damian would pretend to be indifferent, but when he thought no one could see, he looked quietly delighted.

"Have you had breakfast yet?" Alfred asks as he pours them tea. Dick opens his mouth to answer but is cut off by a sharp look from Alfred. "Cereal does not count."

Dick wisely shuts his mouth.

"Hm," Alfred hums, unimpressed. "You are staying for breakfast then."

It was not a question or even a request. Dick only nods in response. Damian looks mildly amused and sips his tea.

"Excellent," Alfred opens the oven where the food was being kept hot and brings them their plates. He places the two other plates on a serving platter and effortlessly lifts it. "You both are much too thin."

With that, he strides away to deliver Bruce and Tim their food.

Dick pouts down at his meal. "I'm not that scrawny," he mutters to himself.

"Of course not," Damian replies easily.

"Are you being sarcastic?" Dick exaggerates his expression of betrayal. "Damian, you wound me."

Damian snorts, utterly unconcerned at his dramatics. Dick straightens in his chair, grinning fondly at his brother.

"You got everything packed?"

Damian nods, his mouth too stuffed with food to answer verbally.

"How did Father react?" Damian asks once he swallows his food. He looks wary, like he's not sure he wants to know the answer, but determined to hear it anyways.

"Bruce is Bruce," Dick tries to keep the bitterness from his tone. He sighs, reaching up to run a gentle hand through Damian's hair. Damian allows it without protest, even leans into it like a cat seeking affection. Dick feels his heart swell with unbearable fondness for him and break in the next second. How could Bruce not see Damian and love him immediately? Dick would do anything for Damian, anything in the world. Bruce doesn't know how lucky he is to have Damian as a son. Damian with his unbreakable strength and loyalty. Damian, who was taught to kill but learned how to love.

"You know I love you, right, Dames?" Damian still looks shocked every time Dick says it. It makes Dick furious to imagine what kind of childhood he had where he expects no one to love him.

"I know," Damian says hesitantly. Months ago, he would have scoffed or yelled or tried to fight Dick.

"Okay," Dick playfully ruffles his hair and chuckles at Damian's scowl. "Let's finish eating so we can go home."

Home which used to be the Manor, used to be a trailer and a circus tent. Home used to be his parents, the others at the circus, and then Bruce and Alfred. Now, home is a shitty apartment in Bludhaven, a penthouse in Wayne Tower. Home is the young boy beside him, his kid.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading and thank you for commenting last chapter I love reading your comments they make my day.

Damian is by no means cured of his mental issues but to go into all that is a whole other story. Maybe I can make this into a series about how canon would change if Dick had adopted Damian and Damian got the love and help he needed.

I really wanted Dick to kick Bruce's ass but I think that Dick knows if he fought Bruce it would only make Damian feel worse about everything and like he's causing problems between Dick and Bruce. With Tim I didn't want Dick to start a fight because I think Dick is the sort of person to internalize things and blame himself more than anyone else. He's disappointed in Tim that he didn't see how bad Damian was

getting but I think he's more disappointed in himself. I hope that clears it up if you were confused about why Dick wasn't more angry. I think Dick would like to be angry but his kid's needs come first and right now Damian just needed to get out of that house.

End Notes

Might fuck around and make a chapter 2 about the immediate aftermath

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